

INDEPENDENT COUNTRY PROGRAMME EVALUATION - STRENGTHENING UNDP'S COUNTRY-LEVEL PERFORMANCE



UNDP operates in over 170 countries and territories. Country programmes are the operational backbone of the organization. The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) conducts *Independent Country Programme Evaluations* (ICPEs) to support the formulation of UNDP's strategy at the country level. IEO aims to strengthen UNDP's **accountability** to the Executive Board and national stakeholders and to promote corporate **learning** through the ICPEs.

Formerly known as Assessment of Development Results (ADRs), ICPEs capture evaluative evidence of UNDP's contribution to national development priorities in a country as well as the effectiveness of the UNDP strategy in facilitating and leveraging national efforts to achieve development results. Conducted in the penultimate year of a country programme cycle, ICPEs examine the achievement and progress made against the objectives set forth in the Country Programme Document (CPD), the principle agreement between UNDP and the respective government and the Executive Board. ICPEs provide a set of forward-looking recommendations that inform country office decisions in time for their preparation of a new CPD.

The evolution from ADR to ICPE

Since UNDP first started the country-level evaluation in 2002, the IEO has carried out over 125 country programme evaluations. As the IEO cemented its independence, pushed forward the professionalization of evaluation, and refined its approach to evaluation, accountability and oversight, two major changes took place:

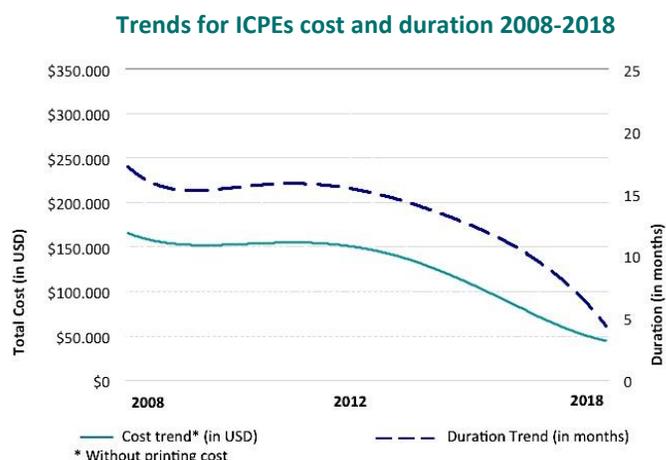
- In 2012, the office moved from a consultants-led to an IEO-led evaluation model to assess UNDP's performance.
- Based on a growing demand for more country-level evaluations, in 2017, the IEO launched a "full country programme coverage," assessing all UNDP country programmes completing a programmatic cycle and submitting a new CPD for Board's approval. This decision entailed significant changes in human and financial resources at the IEO, with a substantial increase in the number of evaluations conducted annually (to 14 in 2018 and 38 in 2019.)



ICPEs process and methodology

To ensure the full coverage of country programmes, the IEO introduced various measures in consultation with the Evaluation Advisory Panel (EAP). For example, the IEO:

- Streamlined the operational process, including a reduction in the frequency and duration of in-country mission, while sharpening its advance country research and data collection and analysis capacity, including the introduction of a rapid assessment.
- Shifted from the standard application of the OECD/DAC criteria to focusing on a set of evaluation questions, scrutinizing the design and strategy of UNDP programmes; the extent of achievement of its initial objectives; and factors facilitating or hindering UNDP's programme performance.
- Emphasized increased understanding of the unique development context in the country that shaped UNDP's engagement strategy and results.
- Focused on the ongoing country programme cycle, instead of the past cycles.
- Introduced a cluster approach for countries sharing similar contextual development challenges, fostering synergies between ICPEs and thematic and corporate evaluations.
- Increased engagement with the five Regional Bureaux overseeing country programmes and with other UNDP units.



Challenges Ahead

Having launched its full country programme coverage mandate, the IEO needs to address ongoing challenges and adjust to the changing environment, including:

- Strengthen the use of ICPEs as a building block for corporate and thematic evaluations.
- Continue to improve ICPE quality and utility by strengthening country-level assessment methodologies and approaches and increasing the utility of evaluation results.
- Better inform UNDP strategic priorities, including ways for contributing to the ongoing UN reforms.

The way forward

The IEO continues to explore ways to address the challenges, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Develop different models of country-level assessments, including a lighter ICPE exercise.
- Further maximize synergies between country-level and thematic evaluations, as well as decentralized evaluations.
- Put a greater emphasis on country diagnostics and classification for improved methodological decision-making and evaluation planning based on complexity, accountability, and learning factors.
- More focus on stakeholder engagement and ownership, enabling better response to meeting the needs of all parties involved, while encouraging the country-based utilization of lessons drawn from the ICPEs.
- Look for internal specialization in technical expertise and collaboration with other UN agency evaluation units as ways to strengthening IEO's methodological capacities.